Social Policy in the 1990s

The Challenge

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Table of Contents

Preface v

Acknowledgements vii

Introduction 1

- Diversity of Experience 2
- Conference Purpose and Themes 4
- Structure and Purpose of the Report 5

Part I The Social Policy-Making Environment

- The Societal Context 7
  - Political/Institutional Factors 7
  - Social Factors 10
  - Economic Factors 13
  - Impact of the Charter 14
- Public Attitudes 16
- Public Values 18
  - Individual Values 19
  - Group Values 20
- The NVO Context 22

Part II A Social Policy Sampling

- Children and Youth 24
  - Child Daycare 25
  - Youth 25
  - Students 26
- Families 27
- Immigrants and Visible Minorities 27
- Seniors 29
- Women 30

Housing 30
How Issues Evolve 31

Part III NVOs Face the Challenge

Creative Tensions 34
Partnership Models 38
Healthy Communities 38
Safer Communities 39
Action on Literacy 39
Governments and First Nations 41
Advice from Participants 42
Coalitions 42
Influencing Policy 42
Challenges for Voluntary Organizations 43
Challenges for the Voluntary Sector 50
Where To From Here? 54
A Presidents' Council 55
A National Round Table on Social Priorities 55
A National Clearinghouse 56
Bricks and Mortar Presence 56
A Framework for Collaboration 56

Conclusion 59

Appendix - Participating Organizations 61

Preface

This report tells the story of a gathering of national voluntary organizations held in Ottawa in late 1990.

As Governor General Ramon Hnatyshyn recognized in his remarks to the conference,

> The voluntary sector is evolving ... Organizations are looking for a new kind of volunteer, volunteers are looking for a new kind of experience, and clients have new expectations. More and more, they want to be part of decision-making, on the grounds that they are best equipped to describe their own needs and to suggest possible solutions. Freed from the feeling that they must be passive recipients of someone else's decisions about them, clients often become shrewd and energetic volunteers in their own cause.

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Introduction

Representatives of 45 national voluntary organizations (NVOs) gathered in Ottawa on October 21 and 22, 1990 for two days of presentations and workshops on the general theme of social policy development in the 1990s. The emphasis was on the nature and direction of change in social issues, the kinds of policies required to address those issues in the 1990s, and the NVOs' role in shaping that policy.

The Ottawa meeting was not the only component of *Social Policy in the 1990s — A National Experience*, a process of consultation among NVOs concerned with social policy development. It was, in fact, only part of a continuing discussion among NVOs about the issues facing them and how they can organize to deal with them. A steering committee of NVO representatives drew up the conference agenda, suggested the conference themes, and identified the policy fields to be represented. A similar committee is following up on some of the suggestions emerging from the meeting.

From the outset, organizers and participants recognized the exploratory nature of the conference. Delegates were to share their views and understanding of the social policy agenda for the '90s, and exchange information about their own policy-making experiences. The organizations represented might well discover common issues or common ground, but no agenda for action on specific policy items was intended to come out of the experience. At the same time, given their concern and involvement with social policy issues, many participants found it difficult to talk about the context or the how-to's of social policy-making without also talking about action. It was a group

accustomed to action, not to talking about how to do a better job with their social policy-making responsibilities. Information-sharing and connecting with like-minded groups are useful, but the desire to *act* is strong, particularly because many voluntary organizations are experiencing growing frustration with the sense of not being heard, especially by governments, on the issues that concern them. As a result, in addition to talking about the content and the process of social policy-making, delegates also spent time on how to plan and initiate joint action.

Diversity of Experience

Participants brought a rich range of professional and volunteer expertise to the discussion. Many, for example, were on the staff of one NVO and volunteered with another. The staff and volunteers of NVOs represented at the meeting were joined by guests from governments, the private sector and foundations, many of whom were also NVO or local volunteers.

The diversity of participants' experience was revealed over the two-day meeting as they discussed their perspectives on the issues and their approaches to dealing with them. Some groups are re-examining their mandate and role in light of social change; others are new groups formed to address emerging issues; still others are altering their structures and processes in response to shifts in focus and constituents' concerns.

At the same time, the language used by participants in the exchange was not always consistent or compatible. Concepts such as community, consultation, partnership, and 'national' voluntary organizations provoked discussion because they raised questions of both substance and

process. Differing definitions of these and other concepts have implications not only for the content of social policy but also for its formation, particularly when the definitions from government and the voluntary sector compete.

For example, government's notion of consultation often fails to agree with that of voluntary organizations. 'Consultation' on a predetermined agenda set by government does not fit the definition of voluntary organizations, as they want to participate not only in finding solutions but also in defining the nature and extent of the problems.

Similarly, the community definition of partnership may be at odds with the government's, if a funding relationship is involved: if government funds a voluntary organization which depends on that funding for its existence, the 'partnership', as governments sometimes call such arrangements, is scarcely an equal one. For the community, partnership by definition requires equality of the partners.

This report reflects this diversity of perspective, experience and organizational style. Readers will recognize the creative tensions at work in the social policy field and policy-making process: competing ideas and ideology, contrasting perspectives on the issues, and different approaches to solutions. As a result, the meeting raised more questions than it answered, identified more challenges than ways to meet them. This was to be expected, given the themes of the conference.

Conference Purpose and Themes

The purpose of the conference was to give voluntary organizations a sense of the context for making social policy and of the possibilities for their participation. The objectives for the conference included:

- providing opportunities and resources for participating organizations to improve their capacity to address their social policy responsibilities in the 1990s; and

- encouraging voluntary organizations and organizations in other sectors to increase their capacity to develop effective national social policy and to develop inter-sectoral partnerships for this purpose.

Presentations and workshops were therefore grouped under two themes:

- *Social policy development in the '90s*: the process of developing relevant social policy in this decade; the national policy context; anticipated influences on social policy; issues and trends that will likely require social policy responses; and Canadians' values and their impact on social policy.

- *National voluntary organizations and social policy development*: the role of voluntary organizations in contributing to the social policy development process -- both public policies and their own policies.

Neither the conference nor this report was intended to suggest that groups should analyze the issues in any particular way, agree to a specific social policy agenda, or

adopt a single approach to developing or advocating policy.

Structure and Purpose of the Report

This report contains three main parts. The first two reflect one of the conference themes: the context for making social policy and the range of issues and trends likely to require policy responses from local voluntary groups, NVOs, or society generally.

The third part focuses on the experience of NVOs -- the creative tensions inherent in their work, the barriers to effectiveness in policy-making for both individual voluntary organizations and the voluntary sector as a whole, and the practical solutions some organizations and communities have found to overcome these barriers. This part also notes some of the steps suggested for future action to improve interaction and joint action between and among voluntary organizations.

The report has several purposes:

- to allow non-participants to share some of the conference experience and the insights offered by participants; and

- to encourage voluntary organizations at the national and community level to pursue a better understanding of the complex environment for social policy-making, the interrelationships among the issues, and how social policy reform is achieved.

The report should therefore be of interest to voluntary organizations generally, as well as to others interested in

social policy. Voluntary organizations may find ideas they can use, experiences they can apply, or the names of organizations or individuals they can contact for more information on either the content or the process of social policy-making. Conference participants came from national voluntary organizations; as a result, local voluntary organizations may find that some suggestions do not fit their needs or circumstances. Some of the analysis and suggestions, however, should be applicable throughout the voluntary sector.

In short, this booklet presents the story of an experience that we believe readers will be encouraged to pursue in their own environment -- according to their own needs and capacities. At the same time, we hope that the booklet will help them assess their needs and improve their capacity to pursue their social policy responsibilities constructively. We see it as a reference tool that will help readers make productive connections at the local or national level, and as a stimulant to thinking and action to promote more effective social policy-making for Canada.

Part I The Social Policy-Making Environment

This part of the report explores some of the social conditions and trends in the 1990s that will establish the context within which voluntary organizations analyze and assess public policies and engage in their own planning and policy development processes. The purpose is to suggest the range of factors that NVOs are taking into account in formulating policy or responding to policies formulated by others.

These factors become apparent in at least two ways. When conditions change in society generally -- whether in the political, institutional, economic, or social context -- voluntary organizations respond by altering the *content* of priorities, programs and services, fund-raising and public education efforts, and social action concerns.

Change in society generally also shapes change in the more specific context of the voluntary community, influencing organizations' *processes*: the approach to a mandate or set of tasks, planning and policy development, and strategies for managing the organization, dealing with governments, and working with other groups.

The Societal Context

Participants identified at least four groups of factors in the societal context for social policy-making in the 1990s.

Political/Institutional Factors: Three issues loom large: federal-provincial relations in the post-Meech Lake era; trends in government approaches to funding organizations and individuals; and the growing sense that as social issues become more complex and interrelated, existing

public policy structures and processes are inadequate to confront the challenges facing Canada.

Even before the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, an essential characteristic of Canadian social policy had begun to change: the federal government began to establish new limits on the extent of federal financial support for social programs. Most of the major social programs are supported through federal-provincial agreements: health care, training, social housing, social services, child care, welfare, post-secondary education, services for young offenders, and legal aid.

The Meech Lake Accord reflected the new approach to funding and responsibility for social programs and would have resulted in major shifts in how future programs were developed. It would have legitimized federal involvement in such programs, but it would also have permitted provinces to seek compensation to support alternative programs, provided they were compatible with the objectives of the federal program. This raised concerns about whether the 'national objectives' test would ensure fairness and consistency of social benefits and protection of rights.

One consequence of the failure of the Accord was to reinforce the belief that Canada's political institutions and public policy structures are not up to the task of addressing the social and economic issues arising from change in domestic and international conditions. Public pressure for extensive participation in defining the country's future is growing. The national voluntary organizations argue that the question of responsibility for social policy must be a vital element in this debate.

In the post-Meech era, the federal government continues to cut back on its contribution to shared-cost programs, and the pressure remains in some provinces to reduce federal involvement in determining how social programs are designed and managed. Coupled with the new limits on federal spending on existing cost-shared programs, this has prompted many provinces to seek increased independence in determining the use of social resources. Indeed, some are suggesting a complete transfer of the taxation power for social programs such as post-secondary education and health to the provinces. Thus concern remains about issues such as national objectives or standards in social programs, fairness and consistency, the protection of social rights and entitlements, and the portability of social benefits.

In the post-Meech era, instead of a national vision (or, at least, national standards) and integrated social policies, NVOs foresee differing program principles and variations in the availability, distribution and quality of services from once province to the next -- and even from one community to another, if provincial governments continue the present trend.

Voluntary organizations are particularly sceptical about moves to 'download' responsibilities because of past experiences with responsibilities being shifted without an accompanying shift in resources or the means to acquire resources. Is the onus on local communities and voluntary organizations to accept the responsibilities being divested by governments through funding cuts? Should they resist this trend by insisting that governments fulfil their financial obligations?

Paralleling developments in federal-provincial relations, governments have begun to alter their funding relationships with individuals and organizations. At the level of individuals, the trend is to targeting social benefits, either directly or through the tax system, by distinguishing among categories of clients in defining entitlements (for example, differentiating between 'employable' and 'unemployable' in determining eligibility for and level of social assistance benefits). Voluntary organizations are concerned that the combined effect of these shifts in governmental responsibilities and funding approaches will be to erode the integrity of social programs and individual social entitlements.

At the level of organizations, the trend in government support is to restrict funding for activities that sustain organizations -- general administration, advocacy, communications, multi-year program funding -- and instead to offer funding for pilot projects and other ventures limited in time and mandate. One result is that the ability of voluntary organizations to plan coherently and deliver services that meet community needs is undermined. This is particularly serious at a time when voluntary organizations see increasing needs for both their services and their advocacy on behalf of their client groups. In fact, cut-backs have been aimed deliberately at activities that support the development of joint action: communications, travel, conferences, research and advocacy.

Social Factors: The social factors in the policy environment centre around the pace of social change and the growing complexity and interrelatedness of the issues that arise from change.

Demographic change and shifting family size and structures have implications for the full range of social, education and health care policies, particularly when change is occurring in the space of a generation or less. The aging of the population, the transformation of the country's ethnic and cultural composition, the change in the relative numbers of single-parent, blended, and two-income families, the changes in the extent and nature of poverty -- all are modifying not only the content of policies and programs but also the very definition of what constitutes an appropriate policy response.

For example, issues such as family violence, poverty, illiteracy, drug abuse, crime and racism might once have been addressed in isolation from each other. Increasingly, however, they are seen as interconnected problems requiring jointly developed policies, integrated approaches at the community level, compatible programs at the agency level, and close co-ordination among all actors with the potential to influence the outcome -- a 'horizontal' response across organizations, rather than a 'vertical' response limited to a single agency or group.

Healthy communities' projects, for example, look not only at health policy but also at the health dimensions of all other policies -- from housing and urban design to education, transportation and agricultural policies. They also involve a wide range of players from many different sectors in collaborative efforts to promote change in the community.

Similarly, correcting social trends such as the feminization of poverty and the rising incidence of poverty among children requires a web of social policy responses related

to income security, child care, literacy, education and training.

Environmental concerns are also prompting calls for significant societal adjustments; environmental protection is becoming part of the definition of social responsibility. Measures to prevent or correct environmental damage can have dramatic effects on employment conditions, economic opportunities and training needs. They therefore constitute a factor for social policy-making, as well as for areas such as transportation, agriculture, natural resources, tourism and taxation. They also have value in connecting social issues, for example, by contributing to better health conditions. But they may also provoke considerable conflict in the future about the nature of and support for social policies as society attempts to reconcile the social and environmental costs of economic development decisions.

This growing complexity and interconnectedness of issues challenges the ability of governments, communities and voluntary agencies to respond with appropriate policies. Criticism of government's environmental or drug abuse strategies from voluntary organizations working in these fields reflects the attitude that governments are not approaching the issues in ways that have a chance of success. Many are questioning whether the knowledge and problem-solving capacity of community leaders and public officials has kept up with growth in the number and complexity of issues, the volume of information associated with each, and the range of possible policy responses.

As a result, policy- and decision-making processes may be taken over by 'experts' and bureaucracies because of their capacity to absorb and process knowledge and evaluate options. This, in turn, raises concerns about the extent to

which community values and priorities will be reflected in decisions and policies.

Economic Factors: The economic influences on social policy-making were perhaps those on which the participants' views varied most widely. Some argued that economic conditions and the fiscal realities facing governments must be taken into account when formulating social policy positions. They felt that the current fiscal agenda must govern planning and policy development, because it is not going to change for the foreseeable future. Consequently, sound policy cannot be developed without reference to anticipated economic performance, its effects on employment and the results for individuals. Others contended that the financial restraint argument is simply a mask for another agenda and a competing set of national priorities; the issue, in other words, is not the size of the pie but the share of pie that Canadians, through their governments, are willing to devote to social policy agenda items. They argued that when 'size of the pie' arguments are accepted as a given, the tendency is to make social policy responses fit the budgetary picture. This ignores the fact that income disparities and the widening gap between rich and poor are the real issues. Instead, budgetary priorities should be re-ordered in light of social priorities.

Global economic trends are also shaping the context for policy development. Of particular concern is the rise of the information and services economy and its implications for the nature, duration, quality and location of jobs, as well as the potentially vulnerable members of the work force. Also of concern is the impact of these trends on such social entitlements as UIC benefits and labour standards.

Perhaps the major area of consensus among participants was that social and economic issues constitute **not** separate agendas but a **single agenda**. They rejected the notion that spending on social, health and education programs is somehow a burden to be borne by the 'productive' sectors of the economy. The economic agenda is neither more important than nor separate from the social agenda. Spending on 'social' items is in fact an investment -- an investment in the country's capacity to sustain its social structures and processes, and in the ability of individuals to participate fully in the life of the community.

Impact of the Charter: A fourth group of factors are those arising from the effects of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* on the social policy environment.

Participants noted the evolution of voluntary groups from needs-based to rights-based bodies and the rise of new rights-based groups. But the question of whether this was the cause or an effect of the failure of delivery systems was not answered. Have needs been met so successfully that these groups can now concentrate on asserting their rights in the mainstream of Canadian life? Or have attempts to meet needs through traditional means failed so miserably that the pursuit of rights and entitlements is now seen as a more effective way of ensuring that needs are met?

For some, the advent of the *Charter* raises issues related to the potential for conflict between the individual rights protected by section 15 (the equality rights section) of the *Charter* and the collective rights protected elsewhere in the Constitution or in legal precedent or constitutional practice. The Quebec sign law is an example of how the collective

right to preserve a language and promote a culture clashed with the individual right to freedom of expression.

Aboriginal peoples are also grappling with the relationship between individuals and the community. For example, if an Aboriginal community wants to run its own school as a means of preserving its culture, language and values, do individual parents in that community have the right to decide that their child's educational needs will best be met in a school outside the community? Who pays for that education? Do all parents have to support the community school, even if their children do not attend?

Several participants wondered whether the courts are the appropriate place to settle these types of issues and, if so, whether the courts are equipped to do so and what role voluntary organizations might play in ensuring that they are. Some *Charter* decisions have benefited equality-seeking groups, but the overall experience has been mixed. In a great many cases, the *Charter* has been used by groups or individuals that are already socially or economically powerful to assert their rights; only in the minority of cases has the *Charter* been used by disadvantaged or vulnerable groups to improve their condition.

Some of the drawbacks of using the courts are the high cost; the fact that officials of the court are not well versed in social issues or in concepts such as equality in the context of historically disadvantaged groups; the risk of creating false expectations for target groups and wasting valuable resources in the process; and the danger of limiting a group's broader policy activities by concentrating resources on a process where the outcome is not certain. Nor can the courts be relied upon to make a positive

remedial order even when a complainant's case succeeds. The complexity and specialized nature of court proceedings are also barriers to the use of the courts by equality-seeking groups.

Public Attitudes

Rounding out this picture of the societal context for social policy-making are two mitigating factors: attitudes and values.

Conference participants heard about three dimensions of public attitudes: towards social issues, towards the voluntary sector and towards the relationships between the voluntary sector and government on social policy issues.

Opinion polls by at least one firm* show that Canadians are confused by the complexity of current social issues. They do not know what the answers are and they are looking for leadership in the search for answers to social problems. They are open to new ideas and tend to reject policies not for reasons of content but when they are arrived at through closed-door processes. They have faith in the ability of NVOs to find solutions but believe the voluntary sector must work with governments in implementing solutions.

In interpreting the data, the polling firm concluded that Canadians' faith in NVOs is more a reflection of their mistrust of government and business organizations than of their trust in the voluntary sector. If the voluntary sector is to play a leadership role, then, it will have to build

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* Decima Research. These results were presented to the conference by Gary Breen, Vice-President of Decima.

credibility by proposing reasonable solutions and demonstrating the capacity to build partnerships with government.

Canadians appear to believe that NVOs have the expertise but that governments have the authority and the resources to implement solutions. As a result, if problems are not solved, Canadians will hold both governments and the voluntary sector responsible. Some participants pointed out, however, that when Canadians endorse the idea of partnership between the public and voluntary sectors, their concept of what constitutes partnership may be very different from that of either governments or NVOs.

Another significant revelation of the polling data is that, when asked about national or global issues specifically, Canadians express concern. But if asked a more open-ended question -- for example, to name their major concerns -- they tend more often to identify either issues that affect them personally or issues relevant at the local or community level -- in other words, social policy issues.

A major attitudinal shift noted by participants is a movement in the boundary between the public domain and the private realm. This trend is helping to change the generally accepted definition of what constitutes 'public' responsibility and how this differs from 'private' responsibility. For example, the attitude that having children is an economic choice -- rather than something families do on behalf of society -- is increasingly prevalent, with predictable effects on public support for programs such as child care.

As government is moving out of some policy or program areas -- and either abandoning or transferring responsibility

to other levels of government, the private sector, or the not-for-profit sector -- a 'privatization' of previously public-sector activities is occurring. But, at the same time, there is a new sense of growing societal interest in certain individual decisions, notably in areas such as reproductive choice and mental health issues.

While participants would encourage the emphasis on individual responsibility, if that implied personal choice and the existence of a range of options from which to choose, they were concerned that, in fact, this emphasis signified an offloading of government responsibilities. They emphasized the need for balance and fairness in defining 'private' and 'social' responsibilities.

Along with these changes in attitudes, participants noted deeper shifts in values: a growing sense that values once thought to be common to most Canadians are not in fact shared widely; rising intolerance for the values and views of others; an anti-elitist mood and cynicism about the political process. The polling data suggest that, if these trends continue, the voluntary sector will be no more immune than the public sector from criticism and scepticism about its motivation and processes.

Public Values

The conference steering committee believed it was important to explore the issue of values because many of the current trends and tensions in Canadian society are, in fact, a reflection of our increasingly diverse values. Values influence views about the appropriateness of individual policies, but they also influence choices about how to implement policy.

Among the challenges for voluntary organizations is learning how to factor values into social policy-making -- not only on the issues where divisions are clear (abortion, capital punishment) but also in policy areas where the issues are more complex and the potential responses many (child care, reproductive technology, health care expenditures, family policy).

For example, if our expectations of the health care system or the public pension system are to be curbed, who has priority? Who decides what criteria will determine who has access to social programs? In addressing the needs of disadvantaged groups, how do we balance the rights of individuals and the collective rights of the group? In developing social policies, how do we reconcile the traditional and new values underlying basic social institutions such as the family? How can social policy reconcile and reflect the differing values of diverse cultures and religions?

Individual Values: Peter Meggs* spoke to the conference about individual values and the growing number of people seeking to rediscover the spiritual side of their nature as a strategy for dealing with the human issues that affect all of us. As more social dilemmas come to be considered individual problems, people are turning away from organized religions and other traditional, institutional sources of help. Networks and self-help groups are replacing them, in part because people want value systems that seem to have immediate application in day-to-day lives.

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* Peter Meggs is the former host of Open House, the CBC radio program devoted to matters of spirituality.

In Meggs's view, this trend also explains rising interest in eastern religions, mysticism, new age religions, and even the return of some to their traditional religious practices and observances (though not necessarily to religious institutions). People are looking for answers. They either reject traditional religion or have no experience with it. They are disillusioned with traditional sources of help and the alternative forms of spirituality seem to offer answers. Whether the search is for answers to new questions brought about by social change, or for new approaches to old issues, the result is the same -- a new emphasis on spirituality, as distinct from religion.

Meggs suggests that this quest for spiritual fulfillment is often satisfied through social action, and that, in fact, many of today's social movements -- Aboriginal organizations, environmentalism, persons with AIDS, palliative care for the dying -- have profoundly spiritual dimensions.

Group Values: Susan Berlin* challenged voluntary organizations to reflect their values in organizational structures, operational strategies and approaches to decision-making. Just as networking, self-help and empowerment are becoming the new values of what were once government- or institution-based programs and services, so new values must begin to pervade the voluntary organizations that would serve these constituent and interest groups.

The current policy-making process -- NVOs petition and propose while governments decide and dispose -- has become outmoded. NVOs are always in the position of

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* Susan Berlin works with the Canadian Healthy Communities' Project, based in Ottawa.

either proposing in a vacuum, without knowledge of the government's priorities or assumptions, or reacting to government proposals prepared without community input or with only nominal consultation. This approach is simply inappropriate for developing social policy premised on emerging values such as community empowerment and local solutions to local problems.

The need to reflect and live by the values they preach in their fields of expertise extends to the voluntary organizations themselves, which should be looking at how decisions are reached in their own organizations and whether existing processes reflect the organization's constituency and purpose. The decision-making process itself contains hidden values; if the process is changed to reflect a new set of values, the dynamics of the process will also change.

As with all approaches that challenge the established order, proposals for new decision-making processes make people profoundly uncomfortable. The difficulty lies not only in taking the first step -- making the initial change in organizational practices -- but in the consequences that flow naturally from that step. No more 'business as usual.'

Deeply embedded social attitudes (towards women, towards 'disadvantaged' groups, towards the consumer society) are challenged in a fundamental way. Long-held assumptions (about the nature of 'democracy', the value and definition of 'progress', the appropriate distribution of power and authority, the ownership of issues and solutions) are questioned and discarded. No one says it will be easy, warns Berlin, but genuine and durable change is impossible without it.

The NVO Context

Against this background of social issues and trends, public attitudes, and values, voluntary organizations face a considerable challenge. Issues are complex and interrelated, so solutions must be interrelated as well. The economic, environmental and social agendas are really a single agenda, requiring holistic policy responses. Dealing with problems such as substance abuse, illiteracy and criminal behaviour requires a societal response to sexual abuse, poverty, and family violence.

A holistic approach to these issues makes sense for individuals and for communities. But holistic approaches are not always easy to implement; they challenge established notions of jurisdiction, policy authority, delivery responsibility and funding relationships. The current division of responsibilities between levels of government and among departments at the same level of government further hampers the efforts of NVOs to deal with issues holistically.

Voluntary organizations face another obstacle in the current environment. Many are finding their energy and resources exhausted by the need to deal with the immediate: replacing funding lost because of government cutbacks; responding to policy or program decisions on which they were not consulted; dealing with new demands occasioned by rapid change in economic conditions or government policy. As the urgent displaces the important, staff and volunteers risk dissipating their energies without making an appreciable difference in the lives of their clients. In these circumstances, finding the resources needed to develop a vision within which to frame policies may be difficult indeed.

Some see in these trends a deliberate government policy of divide and conquer, obliging groups to compete with each other for scarce resources and policy attention and forcing them into a reactive mode. The voluntary sector is not immune, however, to the turf battles for which government departments are often blamed. Some participants emphasized the need for unity, suggesting that the interests of the sector should precede the interests of any one group. As a group, voluntary organizations should not allow themselves to succumb to the same shortcomings often attributed to governments.

Part II A Social Policy Sampling

Conference participants received information about social policy issues for the 1990s in two ways: in presentations from NVOs represented at the meeting and in background materials prepared by other NVOs and by the conference steering committee.

The purpose of this section is to raise questions rather than to discover how issues may affect various client groups and policy areas, or how the voluntary sector or individual voluntary organizations should respond to them. The issues are presented as related by NVO representatives. The result is not *the* social policy menu for the 1990s, but rather a sampling of some of the social issues participants believed would influence their social policy activities in this decade.

Because it is intended to suggest the range of issues that constitutes the context for policy-making by voluntary organizations and because each issue may affect individual organizations in different ways, the treatment of the issues is not exhaustive and the issues are not necessarily listed in order of priority. Nor does this account explore the full extent of common interests among the groups on issues such as income disparities and poverty, violence, racism, social justice, equality and equity, literacy, health and environment, AIDS, multiculturalism and employment.

Children and Youth

The central issue affecting children in the 1990 is poverty. One child in six lives in poverty (one in five in the under-6 age group). The second major issue is child abuse. An emerging issue for the '90s is the relationship between

health and environmental issues which are in turn tied closely to poverty.

The Canadian Council on Children and Youth notes that several factors may affect the ability of community groups to deal successfully with issues affecting children. On the negative side are demographic factors (a shrinking population of children and youth, relative to the rest of the population) and the general climate of budgetary restraint. On the positive side, however, is the growing public awareness of child poverty and child abuse, particularly sexual abuse.

Child Daycare: Accessible, affordable, quality child care remains the goal. Achieving it will require more resources: money for subsidized spaces, capital development, adequate salaries for frontline workers, support for informal caregivers and the establishment of standards.

The Canadian Child Daycare Federation reports that 80 per cent of children are in informal care arrangements, many unstable and of questionable quality. Related to the issue of quality are the working conditions of child care workers -- low salaries, few benefits, little job security. Child care is a social and economic necessity to support parents' labour force participation.

Youth: Economic and educational opportunities are a central preoccupation of youth and groups working with youth in the 1990s. These concerns relate to the extent to which young people's expectations about employment and quality of life can be met in the emerging economy (growth of the service sector, increase in part-time work, etc.) and in light of underfunding of the post-secondary education system.

The Canadian Youth Foundation points out that although the overall youth population is relatively stable, this may mask problems within specific groups of youth caused by shifts in the structure of unemployment and in the nature of youth unemployment (more long-term unemployment and more youth who reach their mid-20s without ever having held a job) or by demographic differences (for example, 50 per cent of the Aboriginal popuiation is under the age of 20).

Needs such as self-esteem, citizenship, social participation, leadership development and empowerment must also be addressed. Environmental issues offer an opportunity to do just that. Environment is a policy area that requires a long-term approach; it will therefore continue to offer opportunities for youth both now and far into the future. Environmental issues hold interest and appeal for youth, and the potential for new partnerships and collaborative, multi-sector approaches is also great.

Students: A major issue facing students in the 1990s is access to a quality post-secondary education. Accessibility encompasses both financial and social accessibility; the latter includes such issues as the under-representation of low-income groups and members of visible minorities in colleges and universities, and the under-representation of women in science and technology (both as students and as faculty) and in senior administrative positions in post-secondary institutions.

The Canadian Federation of Students argues that the issue of financial barriers can be addressed, at least in part, by the post-secondary sector itself, but that the social barriers must be addressed in a broader context, especially at the level of elementary and secondary education. When

children are streamed into various learning programs at this level, according to their perceived abilities, who takes into account the social conditions (poverty, malnutrition, neglect or abuse, language difficulties) that affect performance at school?

Families

A key issue for the '90s is how to support and enhance the capacity of families to fulfil their obligations to each other and to carry out their social role in the face of demographic change (aging of the population, work force participation, divorce rates, intentional childlessness, higher immigration levels) and shifting family structures (lone-parent families, blended families).

The Vanier Institute of the Family advocates a comprehensive family policy instead of the current mix of social and other policies affecting families, some of them positively and some negatively. This will require review of the extensive array of policies that influence or determine relationships among family members and between families, mediating institutions and governments.

The aim should be to ensure that social and family policies promote defined goals instead of having family policy defined through the unintended, indirect or residual effects of other policies; for example, the effects on family structures and relationships of agricultural policies designed to support the family-owned farming sector.

Immigrants and Visible Minorities

Issues for the '90s include employment equity, language training to facilitate social integration and work force

participation, programs that take into account the needs of senior immigrants who speak neither English nor French, and systemic discrimination in the educational system for children of racial minorities.

Issues of full citizenship are as important to immigrant and racial minority women as they are to other groups; at the same time, visible minority women often face double discrimination. A program or service may be provided to assist a racial minority, but often they are accessible only to the male members of that minority. Or, if a program or service is targeted to women, it is accessible mainly to white women or to minority women with a certain level of education. Moreover, the issues surrounding family structures and poverty have an even more detrimental effect on visible minority women than they do on other women and may be compounded by language difficulties and other barriers to improved educational or economic status.

Other issues emerging in the '90s: the need to collect and analyze data on race and ethnic background as a basis for developing and implementing social or economic policy; and participation of visible minorities in government and community groups involved in setting social and economic policy.

The Centre for Research Action on Race Relations points out that effective and responsive policies to address issues such as discrimination in employment and access to housing, health and social services are not possible without clear data on the socio-economic problems facing specific visible minority groups and effective participation by the groups affected.

Like other disadvantaged groups, visible minorities are turning increasingly to the courts to redress social injustices. But this approach to achieving social goals is costly (and raises the issue of whether disadvantaged groups have the same access to the courts, if they lack financial resources), and there is no guarantee of success because of the nature of court appointments, which still come mostly from majority groups. Groups are therefore becoming aware of the dangers of over-reliance on litigation, given its cost, the potential for judicial insensitivity to issues of race and culture, and the uncertainty of the outcome.

Seniors

The catalogue of issues remains much the same as it has been in the past: reasonable pension incomes and standards of living; expansion of long-term care, whether in institutions or in the form of home care and support; adequate, affordable, appropriate housing in both urban and rural areas; and safety and security, including safety from physical attack on the streets and at home and safety from physical, financial or emotional abuse by caregivers (both family and non-family).

As seen by the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation, the challenges in achieving these goals are to combat the adverse effects of fiscal restraint, to maintain the universality of health and social programs, and to overcome the less generous impulses in the community that would thwart these aims.

Women

The challenge for women in the 1990s is not greatly different from the past: of the 167 recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (1970), only 53 were fully implemented.

Economic issues therefore remain important, including the need for comprehensive pay equity legislation at all levels of government. The gap between wages for men and for women has simply not been closed, despite having been identified as a social issue several decades ago. Other priorities include a national daycare act and the decriminalization of abortion (or a decision not to recriminalize it).

The National Action Committee on the Status of Women identifies the democratization of the social development process as a central issue for the '90s. No longer are the 'clients' of social programs willing to see policy and program decisions made on their behalf without their participation. There must also be concerted efforts to generate the political will to take concrete action on long-standing issues (as opposed to paying lip service to the need for action on issues such as violence against women, support for single-parent families and poverty among older women).

Housing

Adequate, affordable housing is the immediate goal for the half-million Canadian households that currently spend a disproportionate share of their income on housing and for the quarter-million Canadians who are forced to use shelters each year. Housing solutions must be developed

in conjunction with employment, health, income security and environmental policies, and governments at all levels should play an enabling role in the provision of affordable housing.

Homelessness and the shortage of affordable housing are the result of the cumulative effect of policies such as deinstitutionalization or the failure of social and economic policy to deal with drug abuse, sexual abuse, family violence, chronic unemployment and inadequate family incomes.

The Canadian Housing and Renewal Association is a member of a coalition of NGOs concerned with issues of housing and homelessness. They have developed an agenda for action to the year 2000 aimed at increasing the stock of low-cost, quality housing. Despite the existence of this agenda, housing for poor and homeless persons remains low on the political agenda, and governments are reducing rather than increasing their spending on shelter-related programs. In addition, governments are taking only short-term approaches by offering direct assistance to individuals. Long-term efforts are also needed to increase the overall supply of housing.

How Issues Evolve

Some participants looked back to how issues evolved in the 1980s and how NVOs responded to this change by adjusting their focus and strategies.

For example, child care originated as a 'women's' issue related to concerns such as income disparities and equality of access to employment. Advocacy groups have made some progress, however, in establishing the relationship

between social policy and the economic agenda, especially the economic implications of failing to provide affordable, accessible child care. As a result, much as attitudes to universal education evolved in the late 19th century, child care is regarded increasingly as a societal issue rather than an issue of concern to only a limited segment of society, i.e. women with children. Other examples of such shifts included the following:

- Some issues are 'new' (or newly revealed) or are emerging as a result of social, demographic or other change; for example,
  - racism and intolerance of diversity,
  - poverty among older women,
  - illiteracy.

- On other issues, it is the approach to and understanding of the issue that is shifting; for example,
  - On the issue of poverty, policy analysis has moved from limited quantitative investigation (the incidence of poverty, the establishment of poverty indicators) to approaches that include analyzing the nature of poverty, its causes, and its relationship with other social phenomena.
  - Issues such as health promotion and crime prevention have broadened to gather in many policy areas in the search for multi-disciplinary, collaborative community solutions.

- The response of voluntary organizations to the issues is also shifting:

- Some groups have emerged in response to the need for comprehensive approaches: again, the safer communities' and healthy communities' movements are an example of this.
- Other groups, however, have narrowed their focus; e.g., adopting a community development approach and local orientation rather than trying to develop pan-Canadian policies or programs.

Part III NVOs Face the Challenge

The aim of this final section is to reflect the experience of NVOs in social policy development for the 1990s. Some of the groups represented at the conference also provided copies of their 'futures' papers, setting out the challenges and opportunities they saw for themselves in the '90s.

The experience of these NVOs is diverse, reflecting not only the range of their constituent and client groups but also their differing stages of organizational development. This catalogue of experiences does not constitute a recommended approach or even a comprehensive guide to social policy-making. Rather, the intention is to give the volunteers and staff of voluntary organizations an opportunity to discover how others' knowledge and experience might help them develop their organizations and deal with the challenges of making social policy in the coming decade.

That policy-making is an appropriate role for voluntary organizations was not in question. The desire of the groups at the conference to play a more active role in setting the country's social policy agenda and developing policy alternatives was clear; moreover, the polling data presented to the conference suggested that public expectations about leadership from the voluntary sector are high. The question was therefore not whether voluntary organizations have a role but what that role should be and how they can organize effectively to perform it.

Creative Tensions

Presentations and group discussions ranged from practical advice to debate on the values and premises from which

policy development should begin. These discussions revealed several creative tensions at work within NVOs, resulting from the clash of competing demands and values or divergent views about how best to effect change.

A fundamental debate, for example, relates to how NVOs should approach the policy process. Is it a question of making the existing system more inclusive and the consultation process more effective, or should NVOs be looking for entirely new ways of setting a social policy agenda and working towards it? What is the agenda that should be addressed? Is it possible for communities and NVOs to define their own agendas for change and work towards them without reference to a government agenda?

Should voluntary organizations give up, as one participant put it, "the wasted effort of trying to figure out how to plug into a system that no longer works"? In setting an agenda for change, should social policy groups accept certain economic or social assumptions about what is realistically achievable, or is it possible to plan and take action from a clean slate? Should policy be developed to fit a budget, or should priorities be set first and funding to implement an agenda be discussed later? Differing answers to these questions are one source of current debates in the social policy sector.

A second source includes the questions surrounding the role of national organizations. How relevant are national organizations, given the dictum to 'think globally and act locally'? If national organizations want to contribute to the policy process, can they do so successfully without sacrificing the local focus from which they draw their strength and credibility and on which they base their analysis of policy needs? Is it even possible to set

universally applicable policy at the national level when much of the emphasis is on bottom-up problem-solving in individual communities?

Voluntary organizations also appear to be pulled in two directions by the need to form coalitions and the desire to maintain independence. Concern was expressed about the pitfalls of partnership, whether with government or with other voluntary organizations. Questions about both types of partnership relate to the relative power of the partners. In the case of alliances among voluntary organizations, the benefits of a united voice on social policy issues are weighed against the concerns that individual voices may be overwhelmed or that the constituency focus will be lost.

In the case of partnership with government, there is the danger of being used to advance a government agenda on which the sector has not agreed. And in an era when screamers and squeaky wheels get attention, is it possible to co-operate quietly and still be in a position to criticize when necessary? In any event, government/NVO partnerships are seldom composed of equal partners because of funding relationships. Can voluntary organizations be both partners in policy-making and petitioners for government funds to deliver services?

Without coalitions, it may never be possible to achieve the critical mass necessary to effect change and to deal with interconnectedness of problems and solutions. On the other hand, it may be necessary to keep the focus narrow to improve the prospects for success — to plan the achievable.

Another set of competing approaches concerns the place of government-based solutions for social policy issues. For

example, with respect to poverty, there are differing ideas about whether government should approach the problem of income disparities through a guaranteed annual income — delivered either as a separate program or through the tax system — or whether local economic development, based on community definitions of the problem and solutions generated by the community, offers a better way to deal with poverty, income disparities, lack of services, structural economic change and the problems of single-industry communities.

There is also tension in the NVO community between the belief that eventual success may require interim risk-taking and concern about survival. Is the ultimate goal worth what may be lost along the way? Is standing up to governments worth the lost funding, the potential for public confusion and loss of confidence, or whatever other cost has to be paid?

Finally, there is tension inherent in defining appropriate roles for the staff and volunteer members of NVOs. There is a clear sense that the staff agenda and the community agenda, as usually represented by NVOs' volunteer leadership, may not always be identical. Moreover, even if the agendas are the same, governments and government bureaucracies appear more willing to listen and act on the advice of 'the community' than on recommendations advanced by NVO staff. The challenges include:

- how to involve the community and in establishing national agendas,
- how to involve volunteers, especially in cross-organizational work at the outset, when positions on an issue are just starting to be developed.

Partnership Models

Through presentations and group discussions, the elements of successful participation in policy- and decision-making began to emerge. Conference participants heard about three models of successful partnership: the healthy communities' project, the safe cities' initiative, and International Literacy Year. Also presented was an example of how partnerships can fail, if the prerequisites for success are not in place.

Healthy Communities: The healthy communities' project is a community development approach to creating the conditions for health at the local level. It is an example of how collaborative action on mutually agreed social priorities can be achieved at the community level. The emphasis is on problem-solving across professional boundaries, because in health as in other social issues, distinctions between fields of expertise or authority are misleading and counter-productive.

A committee made up of city departments and business and community representatives identifies the health issues in the community and how the policies and actions of each affect these issues. The council selects six to ten priority issues and forms sub-committees that, in turn, propose program changes and how to fund them.

Recommendations then go to the city council — recommendations that have a good chance of being implemented because they already command the support of city departments and the business community and, for the most part, involve no new expenditures.

Safer Communities: The safer communities' project is a good example of the interconnections between the social agenda and the economic agenda. Participating cities are discovering how action on social issues can reduce crime and violence and therefore produce economic benefits.

As Irvin Waller* explained, the purpose of the safer communities' project is to bring together together decision-makers with responsibility for policy areas such as child welfare, schools, housing and urban design, as well as representatives of employers, merchants, police, criminal justice and civic authorities, and groups representing youth, women, elderly persons, visible minorities and, if appropriate in a given community, Aboriginal organizations. Their task is to identify problems and solutions, determine priorities, and allocate resources according to agreed priorities.

Waller argued that the safer cities' model has tremendous potential for voluntary organizations concerned with social policy because the majority of Canadians are already convinced that social programs and services have greater potential to deal with issues such as violence and crime than policing and prisons do. It also offers a concrete model of inter-agency and inter-departmental co-operation and decision-making that NVOs can use to persuade governments of the validity of the holistic approach.

Action on Literacy: The partnership of governments, business, labour and NVOs emerged in part from the necessity of working with a small budget. The lessons

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* Irvin Waller is involved in the Safer Communities' Project and is a professor of criminology at the University of Ottawa.

learned from the experience, according to Dick Nolan,* are that the more partners in the arrangement, the less likely agreement is, but that it is possible to work out common ground for action, if the issue is defined well enough. Again it is a matter of determining what each partner needs to stay in the relationship and make it work.

For some organizations this may be a specific task, defined simply and limited in scope and time. For all partners, respect for their internal decision-making processes and recognition of their sensitivities is a requirement of making partnership work. Partnerships at the national level must plan carefully to avoid adverse effects on the efforts of local agencies, and, as in all voluntary organizations, issues such as the ethics of accepting funding from various sources must be worked through to the satisfaction of all partners.

The Literacy Secretariat has depended on partnerships between labour and management in addressing work place literacy and between voluntary service organizations serving those most vulnerable to illiteracy and literacy training organizations. These efforts have supported and encouraged illiterate adults to acquire literacy skills. Also, literacy organizations and the private sector have helped develop substantial literacy training programs and related materials.

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* Dick Nolan is Director General of the National Literacy Secretariat, Department of the Secretary of State.

Governments and First Nations: Ovid Mercredi* pointed to the relationship between governments and First Nations as an example of how partnership with government cannot work because the basic elements necessary to successful partnership are absent: the relationship is not based on equality of the partners or on respect for each other's understanding of the situation and the consequences that flow from that understanding. For example, in the social policy area, a natural consequence of respect for Aboriginal rights and cultural identity is the right to maintain traditions surrounding the raising of children.

Mercredi argued that this will not change as long as the government of Canada continues to regard First Nations as petitioners asking for delegated powers and the relationship between the parties as one of adversaries caught in a zero-sum power game. Even in Manitoba, where there are tri-partite agreements between federal and provincial governments and tribal councils, those agreements do not supersede legislation, so the approach is essentially flawed. No progress will be made as long as this tension persists and the right of Aboriginal people to make decisions and implement their own programs is ignored.

With particular reference to Aboriginal people, but with implications for all Canadians, Mercredi argues that Canada's social policies must recognize individual aspirations and needs, and that partnerships will be possible only if social policy development gets away from the notion that everyone is the same.

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* Ovid Mercredi is Vice-Chief for Manitoba of the Assembly of First Nations.

Advice from Participants

In workshop sessions, NVO representatives offered numerous observations and advice about participating in the social policy process and working in coalitions.

Coalitions: Engaging other sectors or groups with similar interests and developing common proposals before approaching government enhance the chances of success. Making coalitions, networks or partnerships work can be costly in staff and volunteer time and other resources. But at least one participant suggested that collaboration may be able to compensate for the over-extension of individuals and organizations which is common in the voluntary sector.

Coalitions or joint working groups, even of unlikely partners, can work effectively if the issue is limited in scope and the partnership likely to be of limited duration. For example, groups with otherwise disparate views, including the Canadian Labour Congress and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, spoke with one voice on economic issues, in particular, the effects of macroeconomic policy on income security.

The source of the impetus for a coalition or partnership can make a difference to its success and its value to the partners. If the partners are unequal, whether because of their relative size (in the case of partnerships within the voluntary sector) or because of a funding relationship (as in a NVO/government partnership), ways must be found to deal with inequalities.

Influencing Policy: Participants drew a distinction between lobbying and advocacy by voluntary organizations. Lobbying was seen as action to influence specific

decisions affecting a client group. Advocacy, however, was considered a more long-term approach, intended to alter government's perspective on a given policy area so that not only current but future decisions would reflect the voluntary organization's view on what the problems are and how to solve them.

Advocating successfully therefore requires a long-term view, the capacity to survey the policy environment and analyze trends likely to affect the voluntary organization's constituency, and the ability to anticipate decisions so as to be able to participate at an early stage, when the chances of being heard and influencing the outcome are greater. Simply reacting to legislation or program proposals after government announces them is seldom effective.

No matter what the issue, maintaining momentum and sustaining interest -- in government, in the voluntary organization both nationally and locally, and in any coalition partners -- is a significant challenge. Arousing public opinion may help to maintain momentum, but the number of issues competing for public notice and the natural limits of media and public attention mean this may not be enough. Knowing when to quit (as the Canadian Coalition on Acid Rain did) and when to adopt a new tack also boosts credibility.

Challenges for Voluntary Organizations

How do NVOs structure their organizations to gain the capacity to participate in the social policy-making process? If they have not yet reached that stage of development, what steps are necessary to move towards that goal? Participants identified a number of issues.

- Communication within organizations is a particular challenge in a country as large and diverse as Canada. Some NVOs spend considerable time and money ensuring that their member organizations across the country participate fully in internal planning and policy development.

  Travel, fax and computer links to disseminate information, conference calls, teleconferencing -- all these methods are used to facilitate networking, information-sharing, and decision-making in national organizations. Face-to-face meetings are preferred, despite their cost in time and resources, but organizations learn to live with decision-making by other means as well.

- Another consequence of geography is the potential for over-centralization resulting from the fact that NVO headquarters tend to be in Ottawa or Toronto.

  To overcome this tendency, groups often ask provincial or regional organizations to take the lead on specific initiatives (organizing a conference, preparing a position paper) or even move the headquarters at the start of each presidential term (rotating the presidency among the provinces or regions). Organizations for which this is impractical develop extensive and sometimes onerous methods of ensuring that every region is heard from and is included in decision-making.

  For example, as the national non-governmental advocate on women's issues, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) has 570 member groups across Canada; they include a range

of service-oriented, research and advocacy groups. The challenge, Janet Maher* explained, is to find a method of operating that serves the needs of all members and to do so in a way that accommodates regional and provincial differences (and with a limited budget).

The volunteer national executive board structure of 24 members (13 are regional representatives while 10 come from special interest or constituency groups on NAC's priority list) is probably ideal for policy and strategic issues, though potentially difficult to manage administratively. The board meets five times per year and uses other methods such as electronic mail in the interim.

All research, development of briefs and lobbying is done by volunteers through 20 constituency and policy committees which are responsible for primary policy development and monitoring. Two of NAC's 6½ full-time staff are devoted to generating revenue, which has become more intensive since federal funding for NAC has shrunk in response to NAC's advocacy activities. But Maher argues that this shift in focus has produced better advocacy. The question of jeopardizing funding by advocating too strongly used to come up at every board meeting, but by shifting structure and moving beyond the question of funding relationships, NAC has become a stronger organization.

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* Janet Maher is the Treasurer of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women.

- Communication with social opinion makers and potential allies is also necessary.

  Participants identified the need to communicate not only with like-minded organizations on issues of common concern, but also with the systemic players and community members whose opinions and decisions can affect outcomes. Educating bureaucrats, physicians, lawyers, judges, educators, members of the news media, and local political leaders on social policy issues can help to change the general environment within which social policy decisions are made.

- Exercising leadership while allowing for the different stages of development of member organizations is a difficulty for many NVOs.

  As Michael Clague* pointed out in the closing session, national organizations feel an obligation to provide leadership. On the other hand, the definition of leadership should probably include finding ways to accommodate local groups and communities that are not ready to proceed at the same pace as others. That communities are likely to be at different stages of readiness and willingness to participate in national initiatives or policy proposals should be a given in developing leadership strategies at the national level.

- How do organizations bridge the gap between the front line and the theoretical approach to the issues?

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* Michael Clague, who served as the conference facilitator, is Executive Director of the Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia.

The dissimilar experiences of front-line workers and those with theoretical knowledge of an issue can lead to differences in approach. Groups did not offer specific techniques for dealing with this problem but pointed out that both perspectives are necessary; the front-line experience to give the credibility of practical experience and concrete knowledge to policy proposals, and the theoretical outlook to subject proposals for rigorous analysis and to situate them within the broader socio-economic context.

- Several participants mentioned the competing impulses at work when voluntary organizations are choosing a focus.

  Community-based groups may feel they will lose their focus and therefore resist the temptation to expand too much or to link with others to form national organizations. Yet they recognize that they are probably less effective in an advocacy role if they do not join with others. Is working in coalitions on overriding issues just too time-consuming? Does it divert the focus from a group's core issues and those that are important to its constituents? Representatives raised these questions but did not give definitive answers.

- If this work is necessary, who should pay?

  If social policy-making is a valid role for individual voluntary organizations and a necessary adjunct of service to a constituency or to member organizations, how should this activity be funded? Particularly when governments request consultation or require joint action or common proposals from voluntary

organizations, the question of who should pay for this work arises.

Some NVOs expressed increasing reluctance to participate in consultations 'for free', particularly when consultation is not seen as particularly effective or productive. At the level of individual NVOs, groups should take these needs into account -- along with the need to make adequate provision for overhead, administration, advocacy, and support for the work of volunteers in their budgets -- when preparing briefs and funding proposals. When coalitions or joint working groups are involved, costs include not only individual expenditures of participation but also the expense of making a multi-agency coalition work.

- It is important that NVOs learn to plan and develop policy 'with' and not 'for' their constituency or client groups.

  Groups working with youth, elderly people, and persons with AIDS emphasized that the process of developing policy and planning programs or services is not valid unless it includes full participation by the client group or constituency expected to benefit from policy and services.

- Performing coalition and partnership roles and developing social policy in the socio-political environment of the 1990s require new knowledge and skills on the part of volunteers.

  Several considerations are relevant. First, the skills and personal qualities needed to make collaborative or partnership arrangements work are often different

from those required to direct a local group or NVO. Searching for common ground and giving up exclusive ownership of an issue in the context of a partnership can prove challenging to agency workers accustomed to competing for resources and protecting turf in another context.

This suggests a need for a new approach to forming a board of directors and to educating the volunteer resource. A deliberative, policy-oriented board needs different skills from a largely administrative board, and factors such as representation of geographical areas, relevant sectors, constituencies and interests must also be taken into account. The need for specific agency-related skills and knowledge must be weighed against the need for understanding of the broader context within which social policy is made.

Second, if the community is to maintain control of the agenda through the volunteer members of an organization, the complexity of issues and their interrelationships demand new types of volunteers and new methods of educating them. Otherwise, consultation and policy-making become processes of experts talking to experts or NVO staff talking to government bureaucracies.

- Many in the sector argue that voluntary organizations will have to change their own structures and processes if they are to be successful in the substantive issues that concern them.

Less hierarchical structures, more democratic and decentralised decision-making processes, decisions by consensus -- these were among the examples

given by conference participants who argued that organizational forms and practices should be in harmony with the functions NVOs want to perform and the values they want to promote.

Effective coalitions and multi-disciplinary or multi-sector problem-solving require new approaches to ownership and control. To work successfully in these new arrangements, participants suggested, individual NVOs may have to change their internal attitudes on sharing the agenda, acknowledging and including all players, and giving up exclusive ownership of problems and solutions. In addition to challenging individual NVOs, this will no doubt challenge long-established arrangements in organizations with which NVOs want to collaborate. The trick is to find ways to reward problem-solving, not turf-protection or empire-building.

Even language is an issue. To ensure that people of different backgrounds and expertise can work together successfully, issues such as their different vocabulary and definitions, their different senses of time and space, their different assumptions must be addressed. This may involve using cross-cultural communication techniques to ensure that people from different experiences or professional backgrounds can talk to each other.

Challenges for the Voluntary Sector

As individual organizations come to terms with their own role in policy development, the focus shifts to the voluntary sector as a whole and how it can change structures,

processes and activities to become more effective in social policy-making.

- Participants raised the fundamental question of whether effectiveness is impaired by the existence of large numbers of national organizations.

  Is the current number necessary? Is there potential for regrouping or collapsing some groups together? Would this make better use of dollar and volunteer resources and permit more holistic approaches to problems and solutions? How relevant are national organizations in light of the current emphasis on thinking globally and acting locally? Does the existence of a large number of national organizations have the potential to undermine local efforts? Do they absorb funding that might better be used to fund local initiatives? Or does the existence of national organizations ensure that grassroots voices are heard at the national level, a function that would be lost or performed less effectively in their absence?

- What steps are necessary for the voluntary sector to 'get its act together'?

  Participants felt strongly that the current social and political environment offers clear opportunities for the voluntary sector. Michael Clague referred to policy areas being "up for grabs", and another participant commented, "We have the choice between being the glue that helps hold society together in difficult times or being a force that exacerbates existing tensions and divisions".

Participants agreed, however, that the capacity of the voluntary sector to act on this potential depends on its ability to develop community will, formulate an agenda and acquire a voice. Achieving these goals, they said, is a question of changing some attitudes in the voluntary community before moving on to the larger arena of public policy. Participants expressed this in a number of ways: going beyond shame and blame, leaving adversary relationships behind, setting aside turf battles and we/they attitudes.

Those attending the conference concluded that finding new program or service solutions was probably less important than finding new ways to work together at the policy level and to ensure that proven solutions are implemented more widely. Just as important is the need to draw new connections between existing issues and players (for example, the connection between environmental protection/preservation and youth concerns about meaningful work and quality of life) and to emphasize that the common interests of the generations are more important than their individual claims to benefits or entitlements. Programs for one generation reflect a social bargain, not a drain on other generations; there is more to be gained from co-operation than from competition between generations when it comes to policy attention and resources.

Success will also require a willingness to acknowledge that voluntary organizations are at various stages of readiness to participate in a wider policy-making process, together with the will to find ways to encourage the participation of organizations at any stage of development. Collaborative models cannot

work without the voluntary participation of all members; even then, coalitions must still pay close attention to issues of process and consensus-building to ensure that the coalition remains productive for all its members.

- Given the willingness to take the organizational and procedural steps necessary to form new partnerships and coalitions, what should the content of that collaboration be?

  Is it possible to develop a common agenda? Is it worth it, even if the number of items on it is relatively small? Should it be an agenda offered as an alternative to a government agenda? Or should it be enduring, an agenda to be strived for no matter what government is in power -- a Charter of Social Rights or similar framework of shared values and principles against which to test all social policies and programs?

- Then, given a decision on the substance of the agenda, how do voluntary organizations go about promoting it?

  At what stage is advocacy most effective? The traditional methods of exerting pressure and lobbying on legislation or government policy and program proposals appears to have been overtaken by the recognition that durable, long-term effectiveness requires a different approach. This would include, for example, social education and action to establish the policy agenda and to inform public opinion before the definition of issues and the nature of responses have become fixed and difficult to change.

Participants also emphasized the need to open the policy-making process to the public at large and to find ways of making 'the people' heard within it. Polling data and participants' own experience told them that Canadians for the most part are reasonable and generous. They sometimes reject policy responses, however, not on grounds of substance but because of the process by which a solution was reached.

Some participants expressed deep aversion to using polls and polling results as a basis for policy-making. They warned that polls cannot and should not be allowed to define the policy agenda or to assist in the design of 'safe' approaches to policy and action on social issues. Down this road lies the same public scepticism and cynicism that governments attract when they try to follow public opinion instead of offering a vision and exercising leadership.

Where To From Here?

In policy terms and in practical terms, what are the immediate challenges for the voluntary sector as seen by conference participants? An initial concern was that the momentum established at the conference not be allowed to dissipate; the conference organizing committee was therefore asked to consider the suggestions made by participants and to recommend what the next steps should be. Some of the proposals are listed here; although most were made with reference to NVOs, readers might also find the principles and objectives inherent in them applicable at the local level as well.

A Presidents' Council: As a first step to facilitate communication among NVOs, participants suggested a council of NVO presidents. The implication was that such a body would have the potential to evolve into a collective voice of NVOs, if the process of information-sharing led to identification of issues on which joint positions and actions were achievable. Participants also noted that this would re-emphasize the importance of involving 'the community' (as represented by volunteer NVO presidents) in defining and pursuing the social policy agenda.

A National Round Table on Social Priorities: Quebec's regional *tables rondes* on economic development and its regional health and social services' boards were mentioned as possible models for identifying social policy priorities at the national level.

A clear advantage of this approach is that issues can be analyzed early enough, before they become fixed in policy, programs or legislation. The model also offers an opportunity for the NVO sector to exercise leadership on social policy issues because it would foster promotion of common agenda -- or, at the very least, identification of issues considered urgent by all participating NVOs. The onus would then be on governments to respond to the NVO agenda, not the reverse.

On the other hand, a round table (or tables) might become just another layer in the process, removing NVOs even further from real decision-making. The model might also accentuate differences rather than promote consensus or joint action.

A National Clearinghouse: Again, with the aim of improving continuous communication, networking and information-sharing among NVOs, participants suggested a national data base, an interactive data network or a resource centre on social policy issues and NVO activities. The mandate could also include research, public education, advocacy and lobbying. Participants emphasized the importance of combining efforts to maximize the impact from scarce resources.

Bricks and Mortar Presence: In political capitals or in individual communities, housing voluntary organizations concerned with social policy in the same building could serve purposes such as facilitating communication and information exchange. The bricks and mortar approach might also serve to underline in the public mind the importance of the social policy agenda and the need to address it.

A Framework for Collaboration: Even if these process-oriented proposals were implemented, a means would be needed to address the substance of collaboration. Based on the issues raised at the conference, Michael Clague concluded that the challenge in any collaborative venture among groups of independent interests is to establish procedures that facilitate shared actions, while leaving each member free to choose when to collaborate and in what form. When the focus is advocacy on social policy questions, and the sector is as diverse as that of voluntary, non-profit, community-based organizations, the challenge is intensified.

The goal, therefore, is to initiate a process that builds confidence and trust over time so as to encourage increasing co-operation. At the beginning, collaboration

might be informal, low-key and ad hoc. To have meaning, however, it will need to become more substantive and more formal. The effective collaborative exercise is one where there is a willingness among participants to commit resources equitably and a belief that this investment will serve each member of the organization, as well as the cause or issue that brought them together.

The framework Clague suggests (which originated at one of the conference workshops) is a means of identifying social policy issues for collaborative action. The framework is as follows:

1. Statement of Shared Values

   NVOs would draft a statement of shared values with respect to citizenship and quality of life. If pursued in too much detail, this might be difficult; however, it could be based on broad notions of social justice and social and human rights and obligations such as those already expressed in the United Nations' *Charter* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The purpose of the statement would be for NVOs to be on record as jointly affirming and working to preserve and enhance values already articulated as social and economic goals in our society.

   The relevance of any given issue to this value statement would be the first test for determining whether it offers the potential for common action.

2. Mission Statements of Member Organizations

Every incorporated NVO has a statement of purpose and objectives. When collaborative action was proposed on a given social policy issue, each organization would assess the issue in light of its own purposes and objectives. The issue might pass the test of relevance to the shared value statement, but here the test would be different according to:

(a) the knowledge and expertise of each organization with respect to the specifics of the issue; and
(b) the relevance of the issue to the mandate and interests of the organization.

The decision to participate in collaborative action, and the form of participation would be determined by each organization's assessment of these factors. The result might be:

(a) a decision not to be involved with the issue;
(b) a decision to be on record as supporting the collective position in principle; or
(c) a decision to support the collective position and to take collaborative action in forms consistent with the organization's experience, expertise and resources.

Issues that pass the second test would be expressed in a pluralistic range of actions appropriate to the organizations involved.

In commenting on how to make the framework work, Clague noted that the scope of the issue is also important in determining the likelihood of success. If the issue is too large or abstract, it will be meaningless as a focus for collective action. If it is too specific, it will be of limited interest or relevance to some organizations and may therefore lack the organizational numbers that would give it clout. A balance between the general and the specific must therefore be found.

In addition, the key to success in inter-organizational collaboration is to create a climate of trust and confidence by sharing information, reaching decision through open and inclusive processes, and respecting the decisions of each member organization, including decisions regarding whether to participate in collaborative action on a given issue.

Conclusion

Moving forward from this point will require recognition and resolve --

- **recognition** of the need to fill the gaps at the conference table and in the representativeness of conference participants and presenters, and
- **resolve** to begin building the trust and confidence on which successful coalitions are based, resolve to model that building process on the structures and procedures that conference participants identified as contributing to successful partnerships, and resolve to continue learning from each other.

Appendix

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Assembly of First Nations
Canadian AIDS Society
Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres
Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work
Canadian Association of Social Workers
Canadian Chamber of Commerce
Canadian Child Day Care Federation
Canadian Child Welfare Association
Canadian Council for International Cooperation
Canadian Council on Children and Youth
Canadian Council on Social Development
Canadian Criminal Justice Association
Canadian Day Care Advocacy
Canadian Ethnocultural Council
Canadian Federation of Labour
Canadian Federation of Students
Canadian Housing and Renewal Association
Canadian Labour Congress
Canadian Mental Health Association
Canadian Pensioners Concerned
Canadian Public Health Association
Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women
Canadian Youth Foundation/Fédération des Jeunes Français
Centre for Action for Race Relations
Child Poverty Action Group
Church Council on Justice and Corrections
Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere
Family Service Canada
Federal Superannuates National Association

International Council of Social Welfare
International Social Service Canada
Learning Disabilities Association of Canada
Metis National Council
Movement for Canadian Literacy
National Action Committee on the Status of Women
National Association of Friendship Centres
National Associations Active in Criminal Justice
National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada
National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation
National Voluntary Organizations
Native Council of Canada
Native Women's Association of Canada
One Voice
Seniors Network Inc.
The Network - Interaction for Conflict Resolution
The Salvation Army
United Way/Centraide Canada
Urban Alliance on Race Relations
Vanier Institute of the Family
YMCA Canada

Government Departments
Department of Justice
Department of the Secretary of State
Department of the Solicitor General of Canada
Health and Welfare Canada

Foundations
Donner Foundation
Laidlaw Foundation
Samuel & Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation